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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 000754

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FOR S AND S/SRAP HOLBROOKE
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP AND SCA

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SUBJECT: (S) MbZ HOSTS GULF SECURITY DINNER WITH ISA ASD VERSHBOW AND
PM A/S SHAPIRO

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DOUGLAS C.GREENE FOR REASONS 1.4 B
AND D.

REF A SECRETARY'S LETTER TO MBZ ON PUMA HELICOPTERS
REF B SECSTATE 76108

¶1. (S) Summary: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ, also Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces and de facto defense chief) hosted a July 19 executive session of the Gulf Security Dialogue in Abu Dhabi (July 20 plenary with UAE uniformed officers reported septel). The U.S. delegation was led by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow and Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro. MbZ called for advanced U.S.-UAE joint military coordination and faster delivery of FMS items to respond to a worst-case scenario in Iran. As with other senior U.S. officials (but with increasing alarm and a shortening time frame), MbZ focused on the Iranian threat and his belief that an Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iran is likely in a matter of months. ASD Vershbow assured MbZ of the U.S. commitment to UAE security; A/S Shapiro relayed that this visit was his first since taking his new position - reflecting the importance we place on the relationship. Discussions also centered on UAE military and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan and the peace process. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) hosted a working dinner with U.S. Gulf Security Dialogue delegation the evening of July 19. The U.S. Delegation was led by Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow and included RADM William Payne, Ambassador, and DCM. The UAE was represented by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Hamad Thani al-Rumaithi, Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef al-Otaiba, Under Secretary of the Crown Prince's Court Mohamed al-Mazrouei, Deputy Chief of Staff Ali Hamad al-Kaabi and Air Force Chief Mohammed Swaidan al-Qamzi.

Joint Planning for Worst-Case Scenario in Iran

13. (S) In a three-hour working dinner, MbZ focused primarily on his overarching concern -- the threat from Iran, stressing as he has with other senior U.S. officials that U.S. engagement with Iran will ultimately fail and that he fears a surprise (Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iran) in a shorter timeframe than USG estimates (he fears it could happen this year). ASD Vershbow assured MbZ of the U.S. commitment to UAE security; A/S Shapiro relayed that his trip to the UAE was his first since taking on his new position, reflecting the importance we place on the relationship.

14. (S/NF) MbZ reiterated his belief that an Israeli pre-emptive strike against Iran was increasingly likely, saying he was convinced the Netanyahu government was prepared to act against Iran, and that he agreed with Israeli intelligence assessments regarding how close Tehran is to achieving its nuclear ambitions. The Iranian response to a pre-emptive strike, predicted MbZ, would be attacks on U.S. allies in the region, foremost among them the UAE; Iran may also unleash terrorist cells against western interests around the world. ASD Vershbow explained that the USG assessment differed in timeframe -- we do not anticipate military confrontation with Iran before the end of 2009 -- stressing, however, that denying Iran's nuclear ambitions and stemming its efforts to achieve regional hegemony were foremost among U.S. international security concerns.

15. (S) In response to MbZ's position that ultimately engagement efforts with Iran would fail, both ASD and A/S made clear that while the USG continues to press for a diplomatic solution, the offer of engagement is not open-ended and will not come at the expense of Gulf security.

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16. (S) Referring to the Iran Region Presence Office (IRPO) in Dubai, MbZ asked "how's that office doing?" He did not demonstrate any particular concern or sensitivity regarding IRPO activities in UAE. MbZ said that the Iranian regime was in trouble internally and would move swiftly to oppress post-election opposition. As for Rafsanjani, MbZ said he was a "survivor" who would not succeed in a leadership bid because he will not act unless he is one-hundred percent sure he will win. Again turning to his primary security concern, MbZ suggested that Tehran would likely accelerate its nuclear program to draw attention away from its internal weakness and to foment nationalism among its citizenry. "Time is not on our side", he said, hinting that a move should be made against Iran and "the sooner the better."

Russia

17. (C) ASD Vershbow briefed MbZ on the positive outcome of POTUS's recent talks in Moscow. MbZ said that he had met with Putin in June and he did not believe Russia saw a nuclearized Iran as a challenge to its interests, nor did Putin appreciate the threat of regional proliferation in response to an Iranian bomb. He encouraged the U.S. to continue to press the Russians saying he believed if the Russians came over to our side, (with regard to tougher sanctions), the Chinese would follow. MbZ said he would travel in late July to Beijing, where he will surely press the Chinese on Iran. ASD Vershbow suggested he urge the Chinese to send Iran a message by diversifying its oil imports away from Iran.

Afghanistan - Neighbors Not Doing Enough

18. (S/NF) MbZ complained that Arab regimes are not doing enough to help in Afghanistan. He said that as of one month ago, he surveyed the region and found that only Oman had funded its Tokyo conference pledge of \$2 million. He singled out Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular for not doing their part, saying that the Saudis clearly did not see how important it was to their own interests.

19. (S/NF) MbZ criticized other regional leaders for playing both sides and for "dating" Iran. MbZ compared the current situation to pre-WWII Europe saying, "Ahmedinejad is Hitler," and neighboring capitals believe erroneously that they can prevent Iranian

retaliation by playing nice or signing agreements with Tehran. "They think they are backing the winning horse," MbZ explained, emphasizing that if they think that by appeasing Iran they will avoid Iranian retaliation "then they are seriously mistaken, Sir."

National Defense Strategy

¶10. (S) Throughout the discussions, MbZ repeatedly called for coordinated military planning for the worst-case scenario of an unpredictable Iranian response to an Israeli strike, stressing that U.S.-UAE preparations must begin now well before commencement of hostilities. Both sides agreed that improved coordination was a good idea, with ASD Vershbow utilizing the opportunity to push for a UAE national defense strategy. (Note: GSD July 20 plenary meeting reported septel. End Note.)

Pakistan - 14 Additional PUMAs

¶11. (C) Passing a letter from Secretary Clinton thanking the UAE for its transfer of 14 U.S.-origin PUMA helicopters to Pakistan, A/S Shapiro thanked MbZ for the UAEG's partnership and regional leadership in providing assistance to Pakistan as well as its long-term participation in the coalition in Afghanistan. MbZ updated the delegation on delivery status, saying that 10 of the promised 14

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had been delivered and the remaining 4 would shortly follow. He added that efforts were underway to find and purchase additional helicopters, announcing (for the first time that we have heard this) the UAE's intentions to provide Pakistan with an additional 14 PUMAs.

Humanitarian Aid for CT

¶12. (C) In the context of defeating AQ in Afghanistan and Pakistan, MbZ called for Arab and Muslim regimes to do more to stem terrorist financing, whether it means closing down charities, business interests, "whatever is necessary." He also pointed to the zealotness of Arab fighters vice Afghani nationals. Nine-five percent of Arab fighters go to Afghanistan knowing they are going to die for ideological reasons. Afghan nationals, on the other hand, are more practical. "This makes one of them [Arabs] more valuable to AQ than ten or more Afghan fighters." Afghans, MbZ pointed out, have tribes, families, homes -- therefore the best way to counter local extremism in Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent Pakistan, is to improve the quality of life.

¶13. (SBU) MbZ described UAE humanitarian commitments of \$300 million to build "model villages" in Afghanistan, complete with housing, hospitals and schools. He invited the USG to join the UAE, Germany and France in this effort. A/S Shapiro stressed the urgency of the displaced persons crisis in the Swat region of Pakistan, suggesting the UAE consider housing aid in this region. MbZ replied "Why not? We will try to help wherever needed."

MbZ on Pakistani Leadership

¶14. (S/NF) MbZ shared his assessment of the current Pakistani leadership saying President "Zardari is dirty but not dangerous," while Prime Minister Sharif is "dangerous but not dirty -- this is Pakistan. Sharif cannot be trusted to honor his promises. MbZ continued that a new personality may emerge but for the time being the UAE position was to play a helpful role by supporting the PM.

Lebanon - Support for LAF and PM Hariri

¶15. (C) ASD Vershbow reiterated our request that the UAEG assist the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) by funding the purchase and transfer of some of 56 U.S.-origin tanks from Jordan to Lebanon, noting our appreciation of the UAE's earlier funding of the first 10 tanks. This would help capitalize on the positive outcome of the elections and help reduce Hezbollah's (and Iran's) influence in Lebanon. Promising to look into what the UAE could do to help with this

matter, MbZ asked if we had made the same request to Doha. ASD replied that we had and that he would do so again when he arrived in Qatar July 20.

¶16. (C) Reiterating his favored theme of the generation gap in regional leadership (UAE having already passed the baton to the younger generation), MbZ praised Lebanese PM Saad Hariri, saying he was a good man. "He feels very threatened at the moment (presumably by the Syrian regime), and it is important we do not lose him." A/S Shapiro agreed, pointing to U.S. security assistance as proof of our concern and suggested that the UAE support U.S. efforts to strengthen Lebanese government institutions as the best opportunity to build GOL stability and security.

July 18 Nasrallah Speech

¶17. (S) MbZ pointed to Hezbollah SYG Hassan Nasrallah's July 18 speech, saying he believed it reflected a change in Hezbollah's tone due to calculations that its Iranian backers were currently in a weakened state post-Presidential elections. MbZ said that Nasrallah is likely suffering from decreased financial support, at least for

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the next six months.

Behavior Change in Syria - I Think Not

¶18. (S/NF) Vershbow pointed to recent progress with Syria on border control issues to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq as a small step forward in effort at eliciting behavioral change from Damascus. MbZ showed no confidence that Syria could be separated from the Iranian camp. "If you want my opinion," replied MbZ, "I think not." He advised that Syria had a lot of options and that, judging from past behavior, the regime would continue hedging on key regional issues (Iran, support for Hezbollah, peace process) for the foreseeable future.

Praise for Bahraini Crown Prince

¶19. (C) MbZ said that a two-state solution was the only option for solving the Israeli-Palestinian issue. MbZ praised the Bahraini Crown Prince Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa for his "courageous" (July 17) editorial in the Washington Post (ref B), commenting that not enough Arab countries were on the right side of this issue.

¶20. (U) ASD Vershbow and A/S Shapiro cleared this message.